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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000501

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#)  
SUBJECT: ITALY: FASSINO WANTS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY

REF: ROME 0371

Classified By: Pol M/C for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador spoke at length with Democrats of the Left (DS) Party Secretary Piero Fassino on February [¶16.](#) Fassino told the Ambassador that he thought either he or Daisy President Francesco Rutelli would be Foreign Minister in a future center-left government. The Ambassador noted the near absence of NATO from the recently released Union governing program and said a center-left government should not strengthen ties to Europe at the expense of its relationship with the U.S. END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (C) The Ambassador spoke at length with Democrats of the Left (DS) Party Secretary Piero Fassino on the margins of a dinner hosted February 16 by former U.S. Ambassador to Italy Reginald Bartholomew. As in previous meetings, Fassino went out of his way to present himself as a relative moderate within the center-left coalition.

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FASSINO WANTS TO BE FOREIGN MINISTER  
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[¶3.](#) (C) Fassino, a former Under Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the Ambassador that he thought either he or Daisy President Francesco Rutelli would be Foreign Minister in a future center-left government. He said that DS President Massimo D'Alema was another possibility but that D'Alema was also under consideration for President of the Senate.

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AMBASSADOR QUESTIONS FASSINO ON NATO POLICY  
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[¶3.](#) (C) The Ambassador raised with Fassino the near absence of NATO from the recently released Union governing program (Septel). Fassino replied weakly that NATO is so natural a partner for Italy as to be assumed. The Ambassador contrasted the scarce mention of NATO with the intense focus the document places on Italian relations with the EU and Italy's European neighbors. He said it would be counterproductive for a center-left government to lose the considerable momentum in relations built by the Berlusconi government. It should not be antithetical to continue close relations with the U.S. Fassino heartily agreed.

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FASSINO WANTS CONSULTATION WITH U.S. ON IRAQ  
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[¶4.](#) (C) Fassino told the Ambassador that he had argued unsuccessfully to have language included in the Union governing program that specifically stated Italy would

"consult with allies" on any Italian troop withdrawal from Iraq. (Note: The actual statement reads "immediately after parliamentary elections in April, the Union will ask the Italian parliament to vote for the withdrawal of Italian troops. Withdrawal would occur according to a schedule that is based on a timing that is technically needed for withdrawal and in consultation with the new Iraqi Government in order to guarantee security. Withdrawal will be accompanied by a "strong political initiative to support.... transition toward democracy in Iraq and contribute to finding a path for Iraq to attain full democratic stability and which would give Iraqis full sovereignty over their country." End note.) Fassino spoke supportively of Israel and on the need to take serious action with regards to Iran.

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D'ALEMA AND WHITE PHOSPHOROUS  
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15. (C) The Ambassador asked Fassino to explain D'Alema's recent comments comparing the U.S. military's use of white phosphorous in Fallujah with suicide bombers. Fassino flatly called that comment a mistake. He said D'Alema had been under pressure during a debate with Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini and had simply fallen back on his instincts. That, the Ambassador said, is exactly the problem. He told Fassino that Washington pays close attention to such comments, and they are taken at face value.

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MANAGING THE UNION COALITION  
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16. (C) Fassino complained about the amount of time he spends

ROME 00000501 002 OF 002

in coalition management. He said the Union now has eleven formal members, eight of which account for only three percent of the vote combined. He predicted that Communist Renewal Secretary Fausto Bertinotti would cause more difficulty on

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domestic issues than in foreign policy.

17. (C) COMMENT: Fassino is a relative moderate in the Union coalition and even within his own DS party. Like Rutelli (Ref A), he has consistently tried to profile himself as a moderate and potential friend of the U.S. Whether sincere or not, it is unclear whether the fragile nature of the Union coalition would allow Fassino to deliver a pragmatic foreign policy unconstrained by the ideological wing of the coalition. END COMMENT.  
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